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Ministry of Education

EDUCATION AGREEMENT TO HELP KOOTENAY STUDENTS

NELSON – Officials from the Kootenay Lake board of education and the Ministry of Education joined Aboriginal leaders today to mark National Aboriginal Day with the signing of an Aboriginal education enhancement agreement to improve Aboriginal student performance.

"This agreement will bring new educational opportunities for Kootenay Lake Aboriginal students," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "Through this agreement, Aboriginal culture and content will be integrated into classroom lessons, engaging students and bringing lessons alive with positive Aboriginal role models participating in their learning."

This education enhancement agreement builds on that relationship with three specific goals in the areas of academics, language and culture, personal development and positive learning environments. The goals are to improve:

- Aboriginal students' sense of belonging and self-esteem.
- Academic success of all Aboriginal students.
- The number of Aboriginal students who are making positive lifestyle choices.

The Kootenay Lake school district worked closely with local Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education to develop the education enhancement agreement and to identify strategies to help reach the goals of the agreement. The strategies include:

- Integrating use of Aboriginal content in the curricula for all students.
- Collaborating with community partners to create preschool readiness and literacy programs for all ages (including adults).
- Providing positive Aboriginal role models in the school setting.
- Encouraging the teaching of Aboriginal languages for credit in schools.
- Implementing anti-racism programs in all schools.

"This agreement will focus our ability to keep our Aboriginal students in school and successful," said Kootenay Lake board of education chair Bob Wright. "By building a climate of high expectations and supportive inclusion, we are working to make a better future for these students."

Forty-one B.C. school districts have signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements to date. These agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and have been successful in helping school districts close gaps in Aboriginal education.

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With enhancement agreements in place, Boundary school district's Aboriginal completion rate went from 57 per cent to 73 per cent in only two years and Fort Nelson's Aboriginal completion rate went up 22 per cent, from 62 to 84 per cent.

The Province is also supporting Aboriginal students with new education options like the English 12 First Peoples course and the passage of the First Nations Education Act in November 2007, supporting First Nations student achievement and lifelong learning.

The Province is investing an estimated $51.1 million a year – $1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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